

**not with a bang but with a whimper**

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# **not with a bang but with a whimper**

by [dip\\_dyed\\_ghost](#)

## Summary

He knows Tubbo doesn't care about him anymore. He knows that. He's been shown that. But it doesn't stop Tommy from caring about him. He brushes the pads of his fingers over the compass's glass and wonders how he's doing, if he's tired of it all yet, if he needs help. He watches the way it points strongly in the direction over the ocean. He hopes he's alright.

Even after everything, he hopes he's alright.

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During his exile, Tommy finds a drugged and hurt Tubbo on his doorstep. He can't not help him.

## Notes

so i was going through old screenshots and found [this](#) tumblr post, and was immediately inspired to make something out of it. enjoy :)

# Chapter 1

Tommy lies on the floorboards of Ghostbur's vacation home. He pushes his socked feet against the extra barrel of blue he keeps inside, the bent wood creaking under the pressure. He does it again, and again, and again, repeating the motion until he's sure the nail holes have started to wear down, leaving pockets for rust to grow, their cries of protest finally annoying him enough to stop.

He sighs and drops his head back onto the floor with a thud.

Ghostbur's only been gone for ten minutes and Tommy already feels considerably more unhinged. Untethered, more like. He's found that it's much harder to hold on when there's no one else here to help him take up all this empty space.

It's gotten to the point where he's not even sure he's still here.

Well. Obviously he is—he hasn't gone completely mad, not just yet. But *fuck*. There are split seconds where it feels like he fades out. Like he needs to grab onto something to prove to himself he hasn't disappeared, to scrape his hands on the bloody logs just to feel their grit, to ground himself in the physical plane because there's no way his mind is going to do it on its own.

The feeling's already creeping up on him. Tommy sinks his hand into his hair and pulls until the sharpness of the pain clears his mind enough for him to continue to exist.

It's fine. He'll be fine. Ghostbur will be back tomorrow. All he has to do is make it through the night, and after they can figure out their next move together.

Tommy closes his eyes.

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His thoughts always go back to him.

It's so stupid. The whole thing.

He catches himself turning to the side throughout the day, mouth opening to say Tubbo's name and getting the first sound out before realizing that no one's there. Tommy finds himself wanting to tell him all the new little things—like how he found a cool cave to explore, or how he escaped a near run-in with death over a lava pool, or how the way Ghostbur shaved the bark in one spot makes it look like a dick—but ends up having to tell them all to Ghostbur instead.

No matter how nice he is about everything, it's not the same. He's not Tubbo. He doesn't say Tubbo things.

Sometimes, the anger creeps up on him when he least expects it. When Tommy's doing the most mundane tasks, like crafting new tools or foraging for food.

*How could he?* his mind seems to shout, crashing into everything, not caring what breaks.

*How could he just throw me away without a fight?*

Maybe he's just mad that he didn't see it. That Tommy'd give up a hundred nations for Tubbo, a thousand, while he wouldn't do the same for him. That's probably what makes it hurt the most. Sure, the loneliness is borderline crippling, but that icky sense of betrayal that won't leave him be? That's what really gets him.

Tommy would rather die than lose him; Tubbo can't say the same.

The one thing he can truly say he has left are the discs. He keeps them safe, hidden away in his enderchest, and tries not to look at them for too long.

The compass is another story.

He's taken to holding it nearly every night now, taking it out after Ghostbur's gone and floated off, the whole thing feeling too private to look at with company present, even though Ghostbur's the one who made it in the first place.

He knows Tubbo doesn't care about him anymore. He knows that. He's been shown that. But it doesn't stop Tommy from caring about him. He brushes the pads of his fingers over the compass's glass and wonders how he's doing, if he's tired of it all yet, if he needs help. He watches the way it points strongly in the direction over the ocean. He hopes he's alright.

Even after everything, he hopes he's alright.

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Tommy's only been dozing off on the floor for a few minutes before he hears something at the door.

It sounds like a faint knock, and for a brief second he thinks Ghostbur's back early, before remembering that he doesn't bother with doors anymore. Tommy immediately tenses. He sits up, hand dropping to the dagger on his thigh, the handle cold in his grasp as he stares at the unmoving door. He angles himself towards it, ready for an attack.

He's glad he already put the compass back in his chest.

Tommy runs through who it could be. They don't get many visitors out here these days, so the options are limited: Dream was just here this morning, so he doubts he'd be back to burn

his stuff so soon; Ranboo only comes by to leave letters lying around, never to be seen in-person, so he writes him off, too; Techno wouldn't bother with the courtesy of knocking.

A minute of silence passes. Tommy's jaw aches from how hard he's clenching it. He stays as quiet as he can, listening for any bit of sound.

Nothing.

Eventually, he finds himself slowly relaxing again. He brushes it off as the wind. More likely, it's just this mind playing tricks on him, making him hear things that aren't there, as usual. He settles back on the floor, knife still in hand.

The next knock is louder.

More of a thud than a knock, really. As if someone had let their body drop onto it instead of going through the trouble of raising their hand.

Tommy shoots up, scrambling to his feet, weapon at the ready and breath shallow as it gets stuck in his lungs. He makes the effort to breathe properly. Not wanting whoever it is to get the jump on him, he adjusts his grip on his dagger, steps forward, and flings the door open.

His stomach fucking drops.

His mind doesn't quite process what's in front of him. Vital pieces of information skip past his awareness, like the dimensions are being torn and put back together in front of him, because the picture in front of him doesn't make any sense.

It's- it's Tubbo, but not.

This isn't the Tubbo in his memories. This one is wearing a blue, crumpled suit, the stitching torn on one shoulder, his white dress shirt spattered with brown droplets and streaks. This one has matted hair, some strands stuck to his forehead and others sticking up at odd angles.

This one is on his doorstep.

What feels like every emotion possible flashes through him, but the one that's the most prominent is the hurt. It fills him completely, the physical feeling of it taking root in his chest, his lips parting unintentionally as it sucker punches him in the gut.

Before he can even begin to sort through it, or figure out what to say, what to ask, something else comes to his attention.

The dazed look on his face is one he's sure he's never seen before. Tubbo's gaze flickers over him but doesn't really focus on anything, eyes seemingly seeing through him as he leans himself against the doorframe, chest rising way too slow for the way he's shaking.

For all they used to joke about drugs, he knows for a fact that Tubbo's never taken any. Never. He's always been clear-eyed, and present, and aware in a way Tommy would call uptight, but only in an attempt to push him out of it.

Even if they'd had the chance to, Tommy doubts he would've taken it. He can't imagine that's changed.

There's a gash across his neck, blood dried and caked and so very apparent. Tommy has a brief moment where he wonders why he didn't notice that first.

"I—" Tubbo starts, voice cracking and weak, and Tommy just wants to fucking crumble. To throw out any plan he ever had to cover up his hurt with indifference.

Tubbo sways backwards. On instinct, Tommy darts out to steady him, dropping his dagger onto the floor with a clatter and grabbing his upper arm in one quick motion. The movement jostles him, and his head lolls sideways before lifting back up slowly to look at Tommy.

"Didn't know where else to go," he slurs, says with his one last bit of strength.

Before Tommy can figure out what to say, what to even do, Tubbo's knees are buckling and his weight is dropping into him, his form falling onto his chest. He braces himself to hold their combined weight, steadyng them in the middle of the doorway.

Tommy holds on tight and doesn't let him fall.

# Chapter 2

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy sits with his knees pulled up to his chest, leaning against a wall in the vacation home. Glowing coal topples over in the furnace, its dying light casting an orange glow onto Tubbo's sleeping form where he lies beside him.

It's morning now. Tommy hasn't slept this bad in ages. Probably not since his first night out here, months ago.

Back then, he was worried about a multitude of things: how he'd be able to make it alone out here, how he'd get back home, *if* he'd ever make it back, even. Just that anxiety and a heavy ball of betrayal. It was terrible, but he's not sure how it compares to how he feels right now.

In a way, worrying about someone else is worse.

He wishes Tubbo would wake up already so he could figure out what the fuck is going on.

Almost as if he could hear his longings, Tubbo shifts in his sleep. Tommy stills, holding his breath, not risking a sound. The moment passes. Carefully, Tommy reaches out to readjust Wilbur's old coat he'd laid on him for warmth, tugging the edge down over his side, making sure he keeps warm.

Tommy settles back against the wall and waits.

It's probably about an hour later when Ghostbur arrives. Time has lost a lot of meaning to him since being out here, but it feels like an hour, and so that's what he's going with.

Ghostbur floats inside without a word, too focussed on his overflowing messenger bag to notice Tubbo curled up in the corner.

Tommy jolts to attention. "Wilbur," he whispers harshly, trying to get his attention before he makes too much noise.

"Ghostbur," he corrects, whispering back in the same tone without looking up.

"Ghostbur. You gotta be quiet, man."

He pauses, a bottle of honey in his hand. He finally looks up at him. His eyebrows shoot up as he notices Tubbo, his gaze bouncing back between him and Tommy.

"Is that—" he starts, only to be cut off by Tommy's aggressive nodding and subsequent shushing motion. Tommy points with his head to the door, then gets up as quietly as possible and slips outside.

“What’s the president doing in Logstedshire?” Ghostbur asks quietly, joining him out on the lawn. He puts his honey bottle back in his bag and shoots the house a glance.

Tommy huffs. He runs a hand through his hair, grimacing at the way it feels. “I don’t know. He showed up last night.”

Ghostbur gasps with a smile. “As a surprise?” He clasps his hands together. “Oh, how lovely.”

“No.” Tommy keeps himself from scowling by quickly tapping his finger against his leg. “He was...hurt, I guess. I don’t know. Haven’t asked yet.”

“Hurt?”

“Yeah.”

Ghostbur frowns. “Well, that’s no good. I have some healing potions around here somewhere, if he needs any.”

Tommy scratches the back of his neck. “Ha. About those. I sorta already used them.”

He probably used way more than he needed, in all honesty. Tubbo wasn’t very coherent once he’d managed to drag him inside, shaking silently where he sat him down in the corner, which did nothing to calm Tommy’s rising panic. He had to hold the bottles for him as he drank, some of the pink liquid spilling onto his dress shirt. Tubbo didn’t even complain, just drank and lied back when he was done.

Seeing him like that made Tommy feel sick. He figured the only thing he could do was let him rest, but he’s never been good at just sitting around.

Before he fell asleep for the night, Tommy cleaned the cut on his neck with what little clean water he had. He dragged over his makeshift bedding from his tent and laid it on the floor for him. He put some coal in the furnace and lit it so he wouldn’t be cold. All Tubbo could manage to say were quiet ‘thank you’s and ‘sorry’s.

Tommy also checked his breathing every few minutes while he slept to make sure it hadn’t stopped, shoulders dropping in relief with every warm exhale against his back of his hand.

“Oh. Well, that’s okay,” Ghostbur says, “I picked up a lot of ingredients during my excursion. I can just make more.”

The stairs creak.

“You guys are really bad at keeping quiet,” Tubbo says.

Tommy whips around. Tubbo stares at them from the entryway, a pale face beside the cobblestone. He looks slightly better than he did last night, hair haphazardly brushed into place with his fingers, eyes tired but aware. His button-up has so many creases.

The relief Tommy feels at seeing him standing is enough to send him to his knees.

“Tubbo!” Ghostbur exclaims, promptly abandoning his conversation with Tommy to float over to their makeshift house. “We were just talking about you.”

“What a coincidence,” Tubbo says, a small smile appearing on his face.

“Do you want some soup? You look like you need some soup.”

“That’d be great, actually. Thank you.”

Ghostbur looks over his shoulder, spinning around and doing a complete turn. “Okay, uh- we don’t have a table. Or any soup. Do you mind waiting while I make some?”

Tubbo tells him that’s fine, leaning to the side as Ghostbur floats past him inside. The sound of cupboards opening and closing echoes out, as does the clatter of pots and pans as he moves around, gathering supplies.

With Ghostbur gone, the lack of words exchanged grows apparent. Tommy can’t stand it.

He raises his hand in an oddly timid wave. “Hi.”

“Hi,” Tubbo replies quietly, meeting his eyes.

Man. He misses him so much it physically hurts. He shakes his head and lets out a quiet laugh at the absurdity of it all, at seeing his best friend for the first time in months. Can he even call him that, anymore? He has no idea where they stand. What Tubbo’s thinking. Why he ended up here, even.

“How’re you feeling?” he asks, figuring that’s a good place to start.

Tubbo grimaces, then quickly clears his face of any expression. “Fine. Good. Thank you, by the way. For all the-” he gestures vaguely at himself.

“No problem. Yeah.”

The silence stretches out.

It takes Tommy a second to figure out a more delicate way to essential ask, *What the fuck what that all about?*

“Alright, big man,” Tommy says. “Lay it on me. Explain yourself.”

Tubbo clenches his jaw and nods. “I- right.” He spares a glance behind himself. “Can we go sit somewhere?”

Tommy decides to bring them to the big rocks at the edge of the beach. He doesn’t spend much time out here, preferring instead to lose himself in the kind of work that more grassy terrain can provide—gathering wood, searching for caves, scavenging the flora for berries. The beach doesn’t give him much besides sandy soles and a chance to fish.

The ocean stretches for hundreds of blocks, its empty waters granting him too much space, the salty air giving him a headache. The open expanse makes his thoughts seem so much louder.

Tommy drops down onto a mostly flat rock. It hasn't reached its highest temperature yet, its black surface lukewarm in the early sun instead of burning. Tubbo sits down on a rock beside it. He pulls his knees close to his chest and rests his chin on them, staring out to the water.

"My boat's gone," Tubbo says, head lifted slightly with the realization.

Tommy follows his line of sight to a bare stretch on the beach, the sand wet and dark from the incessant crash of waves. "I can help you build a new one," he offers, before he can bite his tongue. "Wait no. That's stupid. Just use the portal path."

He figured that's how he got here in the first place; it takes a fraction of the time he would have spent on the water.

Tubbo sighs, turning his cheek onto his knee away from Tommy. "Yeah. Would've been much easier to flee using that."

The confirmation that he was running from something makes Tommy's heart clench. He needs to cut to the chase. "So you gonna tell me what happened or what?"

"I almost got murdered," he mumbles against his leg. He lifts his head up and looks at Tommy, taking a deep breath. "Sapnap went berserk cause he found out I was planning to kill Dream."

Tommy leans forward. He's half-sure he's heard wrong. "Sorry. Sorry. Did you say you were planning to kill *Dream*?"

Tubbo huffs, rubbing a hand on his cheek. "Mm-hmm. Kill him dead. 'Til no lives are left, my friend."

"You're mental. And stupid."

He scowls. "I am not."

"You are. The man's a deity or some shit. How're you gonna kill that? *Why* would you?"

Tubbo takes his time responding. He inspects the rock he's sitting on, running his hand over what Tommy knows to be a gritty texture. He traces patterns on it, running his fingers across it in circles, before finally saying, quietly, "To get you back, for one."

Tommy's mind goes blank.

The tiniest spark of hope flares up in him before he can help it. He has to focus on his breathing to hold onto his composure, reminding himself of what he's had playing on loop in his head for months now—*betrayal, betrayal, betrayal*.

“You don’t have to lie to me,” Tommy says, voice cracking in the middle. He clears his throat. “I’m not going to throw you out or some shit.”

Tubbo shakes his head. “No. No. I’m not just saying things.” His eyes are wide and pleading, a slightly desperate quality to them. “You- I think I made a mistake.”

“Bit too late for that.”

“Tommy-”

“Why were you all messed up?” He asks, cutting him off.

Tubbo shuts his mouth. He looks down at his hands. They’re as pristine as Tommy remembers, callous-free from lack of hard labour, only marred by the smears of dirt he has yet to clean off. “The sword. He had an enchantment on it, or something. Nicked my neck. I can’t really remember.”

Tommy nods, biting the inside of his cheek. “You said you had nowhere else to go.”

He still doesn’t know what to make of that. If being his last choice is better than not being one at all.

Tubbo rubs his hands together slowly. “I didn’t. I ran from him for hours. Finally lost him in a jungle, but...you know how bad I am with directions.” He gives Tommy a smile, which he doesn’t return. “Anyway, I couldn’t find my way back, and I could barely walk.” He shrugs. “So, I figured I’d come here.”

“How the hell did you find me then?”

Tubbo reaches into his suit jacket, hand slipping into an inside pocket. He takes something out, the object sitting in his palm, holding it close to himself.

“Ghostbur gave it to me.”

Tommy knows what it is as soon as he lays his eyes on it.

The compass seems to be a replica of his own. Its brassy metal is enhanced by the purple enchantment shimmering across it. It sits so perfectly in Tubbo’s hand, taking up all the space in his palm.

Tommy reaches out in a silent ask to hold it. He hands it over.

Up close, it’s easier to see the scratches on the surface, the indents where it appears to have been dropped, all the defects in the outer casing. He runs his thumb over the battered edges. He flips it over, breath catching at the ‘*Your Tommy*’ engraved on the back.

He flips it back around and opens it, not surprised to find the arrow pointing straight at his chest. He traces a crack at the bottom of the cool glass. A strange feeling spreads through him.

“You’re really shit at taking care of your things, you know that?” he says, in an attempt to drown it out.

“Sue me, bitch boy.”

It shocks a laugh out of him. It’s probably the first time he’s felt proper laughter since he left.

Tubbo reaches for it, and he lets him take it. Tommy watches him tuck it back into his jacket, safe and sound.

“I can’t believe you were planning on killing Dream. That’s literal murder, Tubbo.”

He narrows his eyes. “Are you judging me?”

“Well, I’m not *not* judging you.”

“You are not in any position to judge my morals. You’re literally an arsonist.”

Tommy sputters. “Not on purpose!”

“You steal from any chest you can find.”

“I- well. You see, that’s just borrowing without ever giving it back. Totally different.”

Tubbo rolls his eyes. If he focuses, Tommy thinks he can detect a slight smile. “My point stands.”

There’s a shout that comes from over the hill. Ghostbur stands there, waving his arms in the air.

“Soup!” he yells, then turns around and disappears back to the campsite.

Tubbo stretches, pushing his legs out. “Guess it’s done.” He gets up and flattens down his shirt. His efforts don’t do much good—the wrinkles in it are set, creasing in odd places, making him look much more disheveled than he actually is. Tommy leaves him to try and sort it out and starts the trek away from the beach.

He doesn’t make it very far before a hand grabs his wrist, keeping him in place. The hold is gentle. He turns to see Tubbo looking at him with an oddly intense expression.

“I don’t know how to make you believe me,” he says, “but I’ve been trying to get you back for weeks now.”

Tommy freezes in place. He swallows, at a loss for what to say.

It’s a strange thing, to hear Tubbo speak the words he’s been dreaming of hearing.

This is what he’s wanted since the beginning. For Tubbo to realise that he chose wrong and to get him back, finally ready to fight for what really matters. To own up to his mistake and bring him home. Tommy expects to feel joy, some kind of positive emotion.

Instead, all he feels is hollow.

It's a revelation for him. Months have passed without a single word said to him. Tubbo had every chance to visit, to communicate with him, to do *something*. And yet, he never did. Not even once.

No matter what, everything is now going to be too little too late. Tubbo missed whatever chance he had to take this back.

Tommy shakes his hand off, pretending not to notice the flash of pain on Tubbo's face.

"We can talk about it later," he tells him. "I'm starving."

He seems to want to protest, but ultimately, he lets it go, following Tommy back to the campsite, head low and mouth shut.

Ghostbur meets them outside the vacation home. "Tubbo, would you mind getting the bowls? They're in one of the bottom barrels. The one farthest left, if I'm not mistaken."

"I'll get the spoons," Tommy offers, dashing inside to where they keep their limited cutlery, wanting to be out of Tubbo's space for as long as he can. Ghostbur joins him, going to stir the soup simmering in a pot hanging from a hook, heated above enchanted fire.

The smell of soup permeates the air, some kind of vegetable broth mixed with pieces of meat, carrots, potatoes, and whatever other goods Ghostbur found.

"Is he okay now?" Ghostbur stage-whispers.

Tommy nods, pulling the spoons out from their clay storage unit. "Yep. All healed up."

"I think this is the wrong barrel," Tubbo hollers, voice muffled like he's yelling into something.

"Nope, that's the one," Ghostbur calls back without looking.

"I really don't think it is."

Unwilling to listen to Tubbo grumble, Tommy peeks his head out the door. He sighs, seeing the way Tubbo's gone and half crawled into one of the sideways barrels on the floor—a barrel that is, in fact, the wrong one.

"Ghostbur, you made him get into the blue," Tommy says.

Tubbo sits back onto his knees, looking down at a piece of blue in his hands. Tommy's about to go and take pity on him, show him where the bowls actually are, but the sight makes him stop.

The blue in Tubbo's hands is darkening. It shifts from a sky blue to a royal blue and finally to a navy, the piece as dark as his own on some of his worst nights. Tommy's stomach drops.

“Woah. What is this stuff?” Tubbo asks. He tilts it to the side, as if the change in the dye is just a trick of the light.

Ghostbur pops out behind Tommy. “Oh, wow,” he says. He floats over to Tubbo, then reaches into the messenger bag slung across his shoulders. “Here. Have some more.”

Tommy watches as the new blue darkens into the same shade, the two pieces big enough to fill up his palms.

The smile on Tubbo’s face widens, eyes lit up with curiosity. “That’s so cool. Why’s it doing that?”

“Fuck me,” Tommy says quietly.

“It’s blue,” Ghostbur explains, rather cheerily. “It sucks up all your sadness. That’s why it changes colours, see? The blue is your sadness. Now it’s not in you anymore. For awhile, at least.”

Tubbo looks down at the two pieces in his hands. “Oh.”

He hands them off to Wilbur, who takes them with confusion. “You don’t want any?”

“Uh. Maybe later.” He rubs his hands on his pants, as if there’s residue he has to get off. “Could you show me where the bowls are now?”

Tommy goes back inside and leans against the wall, thinking about compasses and home and the way Tubbo’s blue mirrors his own.

## Chapter End Notes

just wanna say thank you to the people who left comments (and kudos) on the first chapter, i appreciate them so very much <3

also, there's gonna be at least one more chap to this :)

# Chapter 3

## Chapter Notes

cw for very briefly implied suicidal thoughts

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It's a bit tense as they all eat their food, silence broken only by idle words exchanged between Tubbo and Ghostbur, the odd clatter of spoons against wooden bowls in the background. The soup's honestly better than Tommy expected; the broth is actually salted this time, and the veggies are cooked through. He decides to keep quiet as he finishes it, not having it in him this morning to contribute.

Tubbo scarfs down a bowl of in record time and then goes back for another.

Tommy wants to tell him to slow down—he's half-afraid he'll make himself sick—but in the end, he lets him be. It's probably been more than a day since he last ate, anyway. He likely needs it.

Also, Tubbo's not his to watch over anymore, and hasn't been for awhile. He has to remember that.

“So, how long are you planning on staying?” Ghostbur asks politely, funneling the leftover soup into large potion bottles—they’re the only sealable containers they have, something Tommy should probably look into changing soon.

Tubbo pauses, spoon in his mouth. He lowers it to his bowl. “Um.” He looks to the ground, voice timid and soft. “I’m not sure. A couple nights, maybe.” His gaze quickly finds Tommy’s. “If that’s alright.”

Tubbo sits across from him on the vacation home’s floor, looking out of place in his ragged clothes that are a size too big for him, pink drops of healing potion still soaked into the fabric. He’s curled around his soup bowl like it’s the only thing that warms him. Ghostbur’s colourless complexion doesn’t help with the coziness of the scene, nor do the fogged windows that seem to follow him wherever he goes.

Could be worse, Tommy supposes.

Before he has time to sort through the idea of Tubbo staying here for longer, Ghostbur butts in. “Of course. I’d love to have a visitor.” He floats slightly higher in contentment, his body shifting out of the realm for a split-second. “Tommy would too, I’m sure.”

He feels their eyes on him, and quickly stares down at the bottom of his bowl to avoid them. All that’s left is a littlest bit of yellow broth he couldn’t scoop up. It smells like chicken and

something distinctly earthy. “Sure,” he mumbles out. “It’s whatever.”

He lets himself answer before even thinking about it, because what else is he going to do? Kick him out?

The faint echo of Techno’s voice in his head whispers, *Poetic justice. It'd be what he deserves.*

The thought upsets him for reasons he doesn’t fully understand.

Tommy forcefully pushes it away and stands up. He collects their bowls and cutlery, bringing them over to the cauldron that doubles as their washing-up area. The cool water chills his skin as he rinses them off, but he doesn’t mind. The cold hasn’t touched him for awhile now.

The thought that he could cast Tubbo out still hovers in his mind, stubborn, like sap stuck to his skin. He caves and lets himself consider it, and then immediately feels sick to his stomach.

It doesn’t matter if Tubbo would deserve it. Tommy won’t do that. He can’t. He doesn’t have it in him, no matter how bitter or vengeful or angry he is.

He almost wishes he did. Wonders if being built like that would’ve given him a good lot in life, or at the very least, a better one than this shit.

Tubbo needs new clothes. That’s what he directs his thoughts to. Once he’s done with the washing up, Tommy crouches and rummages through the bottom cupboards they use for storage.

He doesn’t have much to offer him in terms of clothing. The only clothes he has—other than what he wore when he came here—are thin, full-body cloaks Ghostbur got from trading with villagers a couple hundred blocks East of Logstedshire. Tommy only wears them for short amounts of time; they’re better than being nude while his preferred clothes dry after being washed in the ocean.

He pulls a brown cloak out, knowing without even unfolding it that it’ll be too big for Tubbo. “Here,” Tommy says, handing it to him. “You’ll have to roll up the sleeves, but it’s better than what you’ve got going on right now.”

Tubbo takes it hesitantly, handling the fabric as if it might tear. “Oh.” He looks puzzled for a second, almost as if he’s wondering why Tommy is giving him something. “Thanks.”

Suddenly, Ghostbur is bringing his hands together, a clap sounding out as he cups them in excitement. “Ooo, I’ll get the rest!” he exclaims, then appears to fall backwards through the wall. Tommy sees him fly off to who knows where through the window.

Tubbo looks at Tommy, head tilted, but he just shrugs. “Yeah, I dunno either, man.”

Tommy pretends to sort out the cupboard while Tubbo changes. He hears his suit jacket fall to the floor, a dead weight that never should’ve been on his shoulders in the first place. Knowing that that thread-torn symbol of tyranny is off of him makes Tommy feel a bit better.

A minute or so later, Tubbo makes a sound that could be mistaken for a laugh. “Hey. It’s kinda like the olden days.”

Tommy turns around and is hit with a kind of fondness he hasn’t felt in ages.

Tommy was right; the cloak is too big for him. Much too big, in fact. The bottom edge brushes the floor, its sleeves hanging over his hands and forming sweater paws perfect for swatting people with.

It brings him back to another time. Back to when Tubbo had first joined their little family, and Phil hadn’t had a chance to get new clothes for him yet, and he had had to settle with old hand-me-downs of Techno’s and Wilbur’s and Tommy’s while he waited. He had swam in them, but even then he had looked so fucking happy about being given something that it didn’t seem to matter.

Tommy should probably stop remembering that.

He usually stops himself. He’s always been more of a ‘live-in-the-moment’ kind of guy, only focussing on the present. It’s extra easy to stick to that when most of his old memories are tainted.

The memories of when him and Tubbo were younger are definitely off-limits, so he hasn’t thought much about those, no matter how good and sweet and happy they were. The other worthwhile moments from his childhood all contain people who are dead, or gone, or actively dislike him—all in all pretty shit options, too.

On the occasions when he can’t get away from thinking, he just makes stuff up. Imagine lives for himself that don’t exist, and never will. Alternate realities where Wilbur is alive, their country is at peace, and Tubbo is by his side without any feelings of hurt or regret clouding them.

It’s a bit grim, but it’s all he has left. His past is gone; his present is shit; his future holds nothing he wants to see. Imagining is all he has.

(Well. He does have something else, but that’s not something he seriously wants to do yet. It’s not a choice that can be undone.)

“Still just as short now as you were back then,” Tommy says, needing to pull his mind away from the path it’s dragging him down.

“I am not. You just got weirdly tall.”

“That’s what they all say. Theys who cannot face them facts.”

Instead of replying, Tubbo takes deliberate steps forward until he’s standing in front of him. Tommy freezes. Then, with a look on his face that Tommy can only think to describe as mischievous, he swings his arm at Tommy’s chest, effectively swatting him in the shoulder with the excess fabric. It makes a dull *thwap* sound. He barely feels it.

It's such a stupid gesture, something so childish, but it makes Tubbo smile in a way he hasn't seen in forever.

"You bitch," Tommy exclaims. Without really thinking it through, he hurriedly starts trying to put his arm inside his shirt so that he can swing the little bit of fabric of his sleeves.

Before he even gets the chance to, Tubbo is swatting him again. He giggles as he does it, the sound musical and so fucking sweet it nearly hurts to hear it.

Tommy redoubles his efforts, managing to hide his arm in his shirt in record time. He swings his body ninety degrees, moving forward slightly so that it hits. He gets Tubbo across the cheek, the fabric so light it barely brushes him.

"Take that," Tommy says, taking note of the smile on his own face. "Get wrecked."

And for a second—just a split-second in time—Tommy forgets.

There's no exile. No chasm between who they are now and who they used to be. It's just them, messing around. Having fun. Taking joy in the simple fact of being around each other.

Then reality crashes back into the room, and his smile dies within him.

Tommy turns away. His expression becomes more stilted, leaving behind a slight twinge in his jaw from muscles he hasn't used in months. He puts his arm back through his shirt, feeling a bit stupid. Tubbo says nothing about the sudden change in mood. He just stands there, a bit awkwardly, looking like he's at a loss for what to do.

"You should probably roll your sleeves up," Tommy says.

A pause. "Right." Tubbo sounds so sad when he says it that Tommy almost wants to hug him.

The odd longing makes him stop.

He hasn't had a hug in awhile.

It's weird how much he misses it. He hadn't realized how much casual affection he had been receiving and giving out until it was just...gone. It had been helping to keep him sane much more than he realized.

Tubbo and him used to touch all the time.

Shoulder bumps while walking. Nudges to get the other's attention. Knees touching while they sat on the grass. A bunch of little things throughout the day to show that they were there, and that they were in it together.

(And that's not even counting what they did during the wars: sharing a bed when things got to be too much; desperate, clinging hugs when death got a little bit too near; gently—ever so gently—cleaning the other's wounds when they were in no condition to do so themselves. Those times were rough, but at least he had that. At least he had that.)

Ghostbur doesn't help. He tries, but Tommy brushes him off more often than not—his form feels more like solid fog than a person, and the typical warmth that would come with touch is absent. He doesn't like being reminded of how little Wilbur remains in him.

It's not like Tommy *wants* to hug Tubbo right now. Not in this present.

It's just...touch would be nice. Not necessarily from him, of course, or from anyone in particular.

“Are we going to talk about it yet?” Tubbo blurts out.

It's enough to snap Tommy away from his yearning.

“What?”

“You know...talk about, like, everything.”

“Everything,” he repeats blankly.

Tubbo nods, a small gesture. “Yeah.”

Tommy was expecting this conversation eventually, but not so soon; Tubbo's not exactly the kind of person to go the blunt route, much preferring to beat around the bush for as long as possible.

But hey. If he wants to unearth everything that's been simmering unsaid in him for months, then Tommy's not going to stop him.

“Does that include how you banished me from my own fucking country?” He almost means to sound accusatory, but his voice comes out much more monotone than he expected. It's weird. Empty. “Cause there's not much to talk about with that.”

Tubbo's expression grows pained. “That's not- there's more to it.”

Tommy sighs. “Listen. If we're having this conversation, you're gonna have to be honest.”

“I am. That's- what you said is the surface level. It's not the full picture. Not how I see it. Not at all.”

“Oh, I know how you see it.” He puts on a stupid voice, the one he used to use to mimic him. “It was for the good of the country! It was the logical thing to do!” He drops the drawn-out tone and replaces it with something much more cold. “Just shut the fuck up, man. I don't care. I literally do not care.”

“No.” He almost sounds angry. “I was wrong, Tommy.”

That stops him.

Tubbo had hinted at it before, on the rocks, but he didn't think that he'd flat out admit it like that.

“I did it so that innocent lives didn’t have to be lost. You understand this.” Tubbo waits for Tommy to nod before he continues. “I was the president. I *am* the president. That made me responsible for- for everything. You put me in charge.” He sets his jaw, as if convincing himself of something. “I had to. I had to do it.”

“Oh, this is the same shit. Same broken record. You just keep-”

“Let me get to the point!” Tubbo exclaims, nearly shouting. “I had to, but I wish I hadn’t. I should’ve chosen selfishly. I’m sorry it took so long for me to realise.”

It almost doesn’t register, what he’s hearing. Tommy lets the words soak in, running them through his head, trying to find any way to misinterpret them. He can’t. They sound like what they sound like.

“So you’re saying,” Tommy says, “that if you had a magic button that could let you go back in time, right to when you exiled me, you wouldn’t do it? You’d choose to fight? You’d make the choice to keep me?”

Tubbo doesn’t even hesitate. “Yes.”

It should give him some life back, that confession.

He’s been so alone out here. Tommy can’t stress that enough. The idea that he could finally have someone in his corner—have *Tubbo*—is more than he can imagine. He’s been hurting for so long, and now, finally, after literal months, he’s being offered a reprieve, an apology, from the person he longs to be around most.

Tommy wants to crumple into it. To let things go back to the way they were, and give Tubbo’s apologies the chance to heal over his wounds. A part of him is screaming *yes yes yes*.

Another part of him, an unexpectedly big one, wants nothing to do with this.

He’s surprised. Genuinely. This is what he’s wanted, afterall, since day one out here: a take-back, an apology, to simply have his *friend* again.

Why isn’t it enough?

He barely needs to ask; he knows why. He’s- he’s *mad*. Tubbo’s apology finally makes him feel vindicated, but all that does is clear a path so that the feeling of being wronged can rise to the surface.

Tubbo didn’t even bother to come visit.

Thinking about it only causes the anger to grow. He doubts it would’ve even made a difference in the end, if he did.

They won’t be like they were before. That kind of trust—of brother-in-arms, of ride-or-die, of knowing that he has his back—is just...gone. They’ll never be like that again. Never. That bond broke as soon as Tubbo said the final words. He threw it away.

What Tommy wants doesn't exist anymore. He's being allowed a parody of it, with this apology, a mockery of the kind of bond they used to share.

So what's the point? Even just being around him reminds him of what Tubbo chose to do when it came down to it.

His old life is gone. He has no home anymore. L'Manburg remains, not that it's much of a comfort when none of its citizens cared enough to fight for him.

Maybe he should just say 'fuck it' to everything. Maybe Wilbur was right about some things.

He wants to dig his heels in and let Tubbo see the gravity of what he's caused.

So that's exactly what he does.

"Well that's too fucking bad, innit?" Tommy says. He shrugs, and it almost feels like he's trying to craft a wall of indifference.

"I'm sorry," Tubbo says quietly. He takes a step forward as if to move closer, but Tommy leans back on instinct, making him stop. "Tommy," he says, so much in the way he says his name, "I'm really, really sorry. I'd take it back if I could."

"You can't, though." A sardonic smile paints his face. "So sucks to suck."

Tubbo frowns. "But—"

"No. That's it. I'm past this now. Moving on in life. Sliding down the slippery slope of moving on from all that shit."

Tubbo just stares at him. "Tommy. I'm- I'm sorry."

"Okay."

He's never seen Tubbo so at a loss for what to do, or to say. His hands shake slightly. "I'm standing here, trying to apologize—"

"You can't!" And there it is, the carefully held in anger, the reserve that's been steadily building inside him. "'Sorry' doesn't fucking cut it! You haven't- *I've* been the one out here, alone, for *months*. You chose to leave me out here."

Tubbo shrinks into himself. "You had Ghostbur with you."

"Oh, real nice, yeah, leave me alone with our dead brother, what a brilliant comfort to have, dipshit."

It's too much. He doesn't want to deal with this anymore. In an immensely gratifying realisation, he registers that he doesn't have to.

"I'm going to my tent," Tommy says, not bothering to spare a glance behind him as he passes by Tubbo and walks right out the door.

“Tommy, wait-”

He doesn’t wait. He picks up his pace, breezing past Ghostbur in the yard, who’s carrying a bundle of flowers in his arms. His joyful expression falls as Tommy ignores his greeting. He rushes across the field, taking a second to collect himself once in his tent. He hasn’t been followed. He collects his tools, grabs a torch, and straps on a newly crafted pair of boots.

Tommy goes to find a cave and doesn’t come out for hours.

## Chapter End Notes

Okay, I *guess* there’ll be another chapter after this one, too  
(and a happier ending, promise :p)

thanks for reading <3

also, [here](#)’s my tumblr if anyone feels like checking it out :) although atm it’s mostly just reblogs of mcyt stuff lmao

# Chapter 4

## Chapter Summary

Dream shows up and causes havoc. The wedge between Tommy and Tubbo starts to disappear.

## Chapter Notes

cw for descriptive torture (although it is worth noting that no one is permanently or gorily injured)

scene starts at 'Dream slides the hand on his chest' and ends at 'It takes Tommy a second to come to'

read at your own discretion

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Vibrations travel up Tommy's arms and into his teeth as he swings his pickaxe into a vein of iron. He never gets tired of this part—of the way the stone cracks open and spews pebbles everywhere, his hands going numb and fuzzy. He tosses the heavy chunks of liberated iron into his bag, barely stopping to catch his breath before heading deeper into the cave.

He has to be near bedrock by now. At least a few hours have passed since he came in, giving him ample time to trek down the winding tunnels and deep into the earth. Lava bubbles around the corner, its warm glow spilling over onto his path. He turns the other way and keeps going.

He knows he can't hide down here forever. The surface awaits, with its sun that lets far too much be seen.

Better to stay here, in the near dark, with only the odd torch and furnace around to observe just how hard he's hitting the ores.

Tommy pries a loosened piece of gold out of the stone. He places it in his draw-string pouch, then spares a glance at his pick, deep scratches tarnishing its metal. He rubs the dull tip, its now-smooth point cooling his fingertip.

It's weird. He hasn't had a tool this used in ages. Usually, Dream would have taken and burned it by now. This might be his first time in exile he ends up breaking one for himself.

His finger stills.

It's been...what? Two days since Dream last showed up? He thinks so. On the morning before Tubbo arrived.

The time before that he had stayed away for an entire week. Dream had told him he would, too, would give him time to reflect on how *bad* he'd been, how he should learn to behave if he ever wanted company again.

Tommy didn't even like it when Dream came. But that didn't stop him from biting back any cutting remarks during his next visit. He dropped his gear as soon as he told him to and listened to every order he gave him, memory of the week he spent alone fresh in his mind.

Tommy cringes when he thinks back to how Dream had told him how *good* he'd been, and that he'd be back soon.

And that he'd be back soon.

Fuck.

He pulls his bag closed. The panic that rises up his throat isn't new to him. He tries to remember the breathing techniques, the way to position his body to trick his mind that he's fine, all the goddamn coping strategies Wilbur had shown him but never used himself.

His tattered shoes struggle against a slide of gravel as he rushes back the way he came. Bits of discarded rocks and pebbles from his excavation sites crunch under soles, palms scraping the walls to keep his momentum around turns.

Dream doesn't take any threat against him lightly. Tommy knows that much. If Sapnap's told him about Tubbo's intentions—and he's sure he has—there'll be no hesitation. He'll strike back in whatever way suits him.

Tubbo's gotta know that. What he doesn't know is that Dream might be coming *here*, to him, and soon. Way sooner than he'd like.

If he isn't already.

Tommy finds the entrance to the cave. He breaks out into the sunlight with a tight chest and burning legs. Ingots clack together as he rushes across the plains, the bag thrown across his back thumping between his shoulder blades.

It's been, what, a couple hours? Half a day?

Dream comes in the mornings, he reminds himself. He wasn't there when he left, and now that it's the afternoon, the harsh sun out and the day half over, it's unlikely that he'd show up.

He'd never been one to stick to expectation, though.

The few minutes it takes to come upon the campsite feels like hours. No mobs roam the grass, no sheep or cows or chickens, no living creatures to distract from the fact that no one seems to be here. The ocean waves are calm, barely even a splash to be heard. The absent wind turns the usual rustle of leaves into a whisper.

Unease trickles into his panic, the eerie stillness of the land adding to the idea that something is wrong, something *bad* has happened.

He's too late. Dream has come and gone and taken without so much as a hello.

He stumbles over a stump in his hurry to get to their makeshift house. He rights himself, cursing under his breath, looking for any signs of tracks, of a struggle. There is none. The dirt and grass are unmarked.

Even Ghostbur isn't in the yard, and Tommy can feel a sound building in his throat. He refuses to recognize it as a whine.

Tommy should have stayed. Running off was stupid, careless, a complete lack of foresight on his part, and now it's left him here, fingertips growing cold despite the afternoon sun, lungs full and still, facing the possibility that the only person in the world who still wanted him was gone.

A laugh.

A single, small laugh—almost a giggle, really—coming from inside the makeshift house.

It doesn't sound hurt. It doesn't sound stressed, or in danger.

The laugh comes again, and— and that's Tubbo, he realizes, feet carrying him onto the front steps with barely any conscious input, shaky hand reaching for the door.

Tommy opens it and steps inside.

His eyes immediately zero in on Tubbo. The laugh Tommy had just heard is still etched on his face, his hand brought up to hide some of his smile but leaving the way his eyes crinkle in full-view. A quick once-over confirms that he's fine—clothes intact, no visible injuries, relaxed limbs indicating a lack of threat. Ghostbur floats beside him, holding something in his hands.

Tubbo looks his way, and he startles, entire body going tense in a little double-take jump. It'd almost be amusing, if not for the way panic is still clawing at his throat.

"You're back," Tubbo says, sitting up on the floor against the cupboard.

"Tommy!" Ghostbur floats over from the other side of the room, thrusting a hand out in display, whereupon a chain of cornflowers are linked together. "Look! We're making flower crowns." His face breaks into an open-hearted smile, so unlike the kind he wore the last few months he was alive. "Like before, remember?"

Tommy wants to reply, but suddenly it's like his legs give out on him. He doesn't fall, not really, but his knees feel like their locking mechanisms are dipping on him and he has to reach for the counter to steady himself.

Concern trickles into Tubbo's expression. "Tommy? You alright, man?"

“Yeah,” he says, autopilot taking over, barely aware of the words coming out of his mouth.  
“Yeah. Just...m’fine. You’re making flower crowns?”

Tommy’s heart pounds on his rib cage. He can feel his pulse in his fingertips.

Tubbo’s alright. His face is intact. There’s no blood staining his oversized cloak, no bruises blooming on his skin. Nothing to power the alarm bells still blaring in Tommy’s head.

He’s here. He’s okay. Tubbo’s apparent safety doesn’t help to soothe down his leftover frayed edges, but it does help him zone-in to what’s happening in front of him.

“Oh. Yeah.” Tubbo holds up the one he’s working on like a kid during show-and-tell.  
“Ghostbur practically threw them at me until I started making one.”

Flowers are spread out in front of him, cornflowers and oxeye daisies and orange tulips criss-crossing each other on the floor. A chain of woven flower stems hangs in his left hand, wound around and around until they held themselves together.

“I think me wearing this reminded him of when we were little,” Tubbo continues. He squints as if looking at sunlight, voice raising in pitch. “You remember that?”

And oh. That makes sense.

He flooded with images that took place a decade ago, ones that never truly faded but haven’t been brought forth in a long while.

Tubbo and Wilbur and him on the grass, in front of the house Phil built for all of them. Phil inside, doing whatever he did back then. Techno off to the side annihilating a bag of mulch with his sword. The summer breeze weaving through the tall grass and bringing with it the fresh smell of the lake nearby, notes of allium rising when it stilled.

It didn’t matter that it was hot. The heat didn’t stop Tommy from running around and picking flowers by the armful, only to then rush back and dump them at Wilbur’s feet, demanding that he teach them how to make the crowns he so often wore back then.

It was really only that summer that they did that. The appeal was lost in later years, once they were allowed to venture into the woods and climb and cause minor havoc.

Tommy doesn’t even know if he could still make one. All he knows is that this is like a photograph thrown through time—Tubbo’s sleeves still too big, needing to be pushed up every few seconds he worked, stems bending clumsily in his fingers.

“How the hell do you still know how to make one?” Tommy asks, needing to say something before his throat closes up.

“What, like it’s hard?” He drops a cheekiness after a beat. “I don’t know. It just stuck. I didn’t know I could do it until I did.”

“He’s showing me how,” Ghostbur adds. The chain in his hand is admittedly lackluster compared to Tubbo’s, the gaps between flowers far too spaced-out, but it still holds its own.

"Do you want to try?"

Tommy's hands twitch at his sides. Leftover energy buzzes through him. He itches for something to do, even as a tired ache attempts to calm his tense muscles.

"Sure," he says, lowering himself down across from Tubbo. "Fuck it. Give me the stupid flowers."

Tommy sets his bag aside. Taking a handful of orange tulips from the pile, he settles in, trying his best to remember how the hell they used to do this.

Tubbo takes pity on him. In a calm, well-displayed manner, he shows him how to hold his starting stem and which way to wrap the other flowers around it. The stems are smooth and not quite free of morning dew, bending fluidly in his hands.

In no time at all he's finishing up his crown. Certain parts are lopsided, stems stretched a bit more than they should've been, some pedals pressed to translucency, but it's not terrible. His six year old self probably could have done better, though.

His chest aches.

"I genuinely haven't made one of these in years," Tommy says.

"Same."

Ghostbur hums. "That's the problem," he says, much too cheerily. "You guys spend too much time doing the wrong stuff and not enough doing what we used to." He flickers, form fading and resolidifying as he closes his eyes. "We were so *happy* back then."

"Making flower crowns won't run a nation," Tubbo says, voice clipped. "Or make you happy. And anyway, you're a ghost, so. Not like you have much else to do."

Ghostbur frowns. "I... do you want some more blue, Tubbo?"

"No. No thank you."

"I would," Tommy interjects. They both turn to look at him; Ghostbur, with pleasant surprise, and Tubbo, sporting a look he can't decipher.

The ache in his chest had deepened in the longer the light weight of the tulips rested on his lap. And it was dumb, he knew it was dumb, the longing filling him having nothing to do with flowers and everything to do with the way they used to be together, unburdened, untouched by the thorns that had yet to grow between them all.

He wanted that again. He wanted it and he wanted to not want it and he'd reached a point where he'd let Wilbur's (*Ghostbur's*, fuck) creepy ass blue take that burden away.

"What?" Tommy asks.

Tubbo shrugs and looks down.

Ghostbur leaves to go get some. It's silent between them while he's gone, no time to say anything before he's back, beaming like a kid showing off a project he's proud of.

Tommy hesitates, if only for a second. He lets Ghostbur set a piece down in his palm.

The blue is soft but solid. He rubs his thumb over it, its colour slowly deepening in shade.

He doesn't feel any better.

What was the point if it didn't make him feel better about...about what, actually?

He tries to think back to why he'd wanted the damn stuff in the first place. The harder he focuses, the more the answer seems to evade him, mind hurting with the strain. He gives up, unsure whether to feel uneasy or relieved.

Tubbo avoids his eyes, playing with the too-long cuffs on his robe, whereas Ghostbur appears downright gleeful.

Tommy places the blue on the ground.

For a second, nothing changes. He's suspended in time. After a beat, memories reappear and creep up on him, flooding back into his head and into awareness. Everything whirls.

It's sickening. He feels...*wrong*, almost. His stomach turns. Bad decision. Bad, bad decision. He's not doing that again.

"Thanks, Ghostbur," he says, smile strained. Before he can reply, Tommy sticks out a leg to poke Tubbo. His iron boot brushes his knee. "Also, big man, I need to warn you that Dream might be coming here tomorrow."

The distraction works. His head snaps up. "What? Why?"

"He likes to visit, sometimes. Torment the innocent. Typical green blob shit."

"What do you mean by 'torment'?"

Tommy opens his mouth, then closes it. "Y'know...just, like, being annoying." Not that he considered blowing his stuff to smithereens and pushing him around until he cries out merely *annoying*, but Tubbo doesn't need to know about that.

"Yeah, but annoying how?" He turns. "Ghostbur?"

Ghostbur shakes his head with a hum. "He doesn't seem annoying to me. Dream is nice."

Tommy snorts. "To you, maybe. He brings you books and sends you away to read. All he gives me is—" *bruises*, he thinks. *Nightmares*. "Nothing. He gives me absolutely nothing."

Tubbo gives him a look at that, but doesn't say anything about it.

"We're going to have to hide you if he comes," Tommy continues. "There's a bunker beneath here he doesn't know about."

"A bunker? Is it...those aren't very big."

"You'll fit. Tiny man like you."

Instead of earning him a laugh or some kind of quip back, all he gets is a slightly panicked look. Tubbo bites his lip. "It's just...I'll do it, it's just small." He points his palms towards each other and brings them closer. "Confined," he says quietly, "you know?"

"Oh. *Oh.*"

Images he'd rather not remember hit him at full speed.

That obsidian box placed like an omen. Small hands clawing at it like they had any chance of wearing it down. Big, staccato bursts of red and blue and white punctured by the worst scream he'd ever heard.

Tommy quickly shakes his head. "You don't have to go down there. I can think of somewhere else."

"It doesn't matter. I'll be fine."

"No. No no no. There's literally a dozen other options. Fuck that."

Tubbo offers him a soft smile—so soft it's barely there—before casting his gaze downwards and drawing his limbs closer to his body.

Tommy smiles back.

---

For supper they'd had leftover soup, heating up the pot above a campfire Tubbo started a few feet away from the house. It was later than he usually ate, sunset already smeared across the sky and fading fast, but Tommy didn't mind; it was kind of nice, the heat of his bowl warming his hands amid cooling air.

Afterwards, Tommy stretches out and lays down on the grass. Out of the corner of his eye he can see Ghostbur puttering around inside with the dishes, taking a break every few moments to shove random gear into his bag.

"Where did he say he was going again?" Tubbo asks, laying down to sprawl beside him.

"Don't ask me. Pretty sure he just wanders."

Ghostbur places a few glass bottles into his satchel. They clink softly against one another, sound muffled.

"I think I would too, as a ghost," Tubbo says. "Just wander. Check things out."

Tommy turns his head into the grass to look at him. Their fire's dying flames make his cheeks glow, body cast half in shadow, half in warmth.

"Yeah?" Tommy fiddles with a piece of grass. "I'd haunt shit. Make my death everyone else's problem."

"Would you haunt me?"

His hand stills. "I..." he starts, then shrugs. "Probably, honestly. Not in a mean way, though. Just for, like, company."

"Yeah. I'd do that too."

Ghostbur's potion bottles clink against his hip with every other step he takes towards them. He gives the both of them a wave as he passes by, smile slapped across his face.

They say their goodbyes. Tommy lets his head fall back into the grass, sky now a deep, navy blue above him. He can do this, he assures himself. He's been left alone now more times than he can count. And Ghostbur always comes back.

All that's left in the yard are him and Tubbo and glowing embers that flicker with the rush of the wind. Tommy closes his eyes, letting his hair be carded by the breeze.

They stay there, out on the lawn, until the last of the sunlight leaves and pinpricks of stars begin to reveal themselves. The dark envelopes them whole.

"Tommy," Tubbo says, breaking the minutes-long silence, the controlled tone of his voice making Tommy push himself up on his elbows. "I think someone's here."

From this angle, the entryway to the campsite opens up into shadows of berry bushes and overgrown trees, a hidden path amidst them leading down to a small pier Dream had fashioned. Through the dark slashes of branches, a small light shines, lantern glow bobbing behind the cover of trees. Had it not been for nightfall, he'd never have seen it.

His throat closes.

"Hide," Tommy says.

They scramble, Tommy running and pulling Tubbo with him, stumbling to a stretch of forest beyond the campsite walls where twisted roots invade the mossy grove.

"Just- run. Stay there until I come get you."

Tubbo nods. He disappears into the dark, needing only to go a few steps until Tommy can't see him even while straining his vision.

Tommy walks back to the campsite entrance, focusing on his breathing. In and out. Lungs doing what they're goddamn supposed to. Everything is fine.

Everything is not fine.

Dream sits cross-legged beside the remains of the campfire, hands holding his ankles, head tilted so that the smiley face on his mask gives off the illusion of being lopsided. He stares. Embered-glow caresses his battered edges.

It pains him to fall into his new role, but Tommy can already feel the way his own body is closing in on him. He wants to tell him to fuck off, to stop coming back, but all that comes out is a meek, "Hi, Dream."

"Tommy," he greets, rising to his feet with such agility and speed that Tommy's breath stills in his chest. "Hello."

"Hi," he repeats, dumbly. The brief flare of embarrassment it gives him is enough to bring himself back, at least a little bit. "You're late."

"Late? I visit you when I feel like it. There is no late."

Tommy shrugs, legs finally kicking into motion as he heads straight for the house. He'd rather not be confined, if worst comes to worst, but it's where a large portion of his weapons are. Having them nearby would help.

"Sorry, big man. Business hours are closed."

He doesn't make it very far. Dream steps out in front of him, form large and imposing, buckles and various straps adorning his clothing. Tommy stops, swallowing.

"What are these?" Dream asks, kicking Tommy's iron boots. "Been busy, I see."

He doesn't even care, at this point. He'll do what he has to to get him to leave as soon as possible.

Tommy's fingers slip on the clasps of his boots.

"Oh, no, I'm not here for that," Dreams says. "You can keep them. For now."

Tommy pauses, his hands stilling. He tilts his head up. "Really?"

"Really." Dream moves closer, then rests a hand on Tommy's shoulder. The pressure makes him cringe. It's too heavy, and he wants nothing more than to shove it off him and stop the feeling of being suffocated.

Tommy swallows and leaves his hand there. He straightens up, head cast down slightly. "Thank you," he says quietly.

Dream's hand squeezes, and he has to fight back the urge to flinch. "Of course." He pauses, and the silence stretches thin. "I'm here for something else, actually."

Tommy doesn't let himself tense, doesn't let anything incriminating show on his face, instead arranging his expression into what he hopes comes across as polite curiosity.

“Oh?”

Dream hums, then removes his hand. Tommy resists brushing off his shoulder.

His voice drops its airy, conversational feel, taking on something much more serious. He sounds done.

“I know Tubbo's here, Tommy.”

Tommy keeps his eyes trained on his mask, focuses on it as a way to ground himself. The gears in his mind spin.

He's quiet for a beat too long. “Tubbo? Haven't seen that guy in ages.” He huffs, the sound coming out much more strained than he would have liked. “I mean, come on. He's never even visited.”

Dream reaches out and tilts Tommy's head up. “I think you misunderstood me.” He leans forward, mask blank and eerie. “I'm not asking you if he's here. I'm asking *where*.”

Tommy steps out of his reach, jaw clenched. “He's not here,” he forces out. “I don't know what to tell you.”

Dream slowly shakes his head. A sound comes out of him, and it takes Tommy a second to realize that he's *laughing*, a deep chuckle that makes the hair on the nape of his neck stand up, not an expression of amusement but rather one of contempt.

“You know,” he starts, “I'm kind of glad you're being difficult.” He reaches into the pouch slung across his side, glass clinking as his hand closes around something hidden from view. “Means I get to have more fun. Don't you want to have *fun*, Tommy?”

The something comes into view. Pressed firmly in Dream's hand is a splash potion, electric blue liquid sloshing as he brings it out of his pouch.

Tommy has no time to react before Dream is reeling his arm back and smashing it at his feet.

Tommy yelps as he stumbles backwards, neon blue particles rising around him, sinking into his clothes, his skin, his lungs. He panics, mentally flipping through his knowledge of potions. It's not weakness, not instant damage, not slowness—what the fuck kind of potion is *neon blue*?

He doesn't want to be around Dream when he finds out.

He books it for the entrance to the campsite, hoping to at least gain some distance before the potion can hit, maybe even grab a weapon from his tent instead. He knows fighting him would be futile—it always is—but he's not just going to *take it*. And he's sure as hell not telling him anything.

It only takes a few steps for the feeling of the ground to change. What used to be tiny pebbles littering the ground now feel massive, sharp edges prodding into his sole with each slam propelling him forwards.

The material of his shirt is no longer cotton softened by years of wear; instead, it almost feels like it's made of thousands of minuscule needles, all pricking his skin with every shift. His pants are even worse—everywhere its thick material brushes against the skin *hurts*, like a rug burn or scrape.

Tommy is nowhere near the entrance when Dream grabs his arm and practically pulls it out of its socket.

He lets out a sound like a wounded animal, barely noticing his cry over the pain suddenly shooting up and around his arm. He's been tugged around by Dream before, and it does *not* feel like that, like his bones are being grinded, pain so intense he's struggling for air.

Tommy's boots tilt off the ground as Dream raises him up, then leave completely as he throws him down.

To say the impact knocks the wind out of him is an understatement. His back takes the full brunt of the impact, lungs feeling like they're collapsing and collapsing and collapsing, nausea overtaking him as his body refuses to breathe.

By the time he finally gets the smallest gasp of air in, Dream has thrown a leg over his hips and settled on his stomach, pinning both of his hands down with one of his own. He uses his free hand to grab Tommy by the jaw and force him to look forwards.

"This doesn't have to hurt, Tommy." He loosens his hold on his jaw, letting his hands slide down his neck to then press on his chest. "I just want to talk to him."

"Liar," Tommy spits out. Rocks dig into his lower back, the pointy feel of them cutting through his waistband. Dream's holding onto his wrist so hard he's half-afraid something's going to snap. "The fuck'd you throw at me?"

"Just a little something George brewed up. Supposed to make you more sensitive."

Dream slides the hand on his chest down to his stomach, the gentleness making him shiver. He lingers, then without warning digs his nails in, and the sudden pain makes Tommy grits his teeth, eyes slamming shut. Unsatisfied, Dream presses harder, not letting up until Tommy chokes out a muffled cry of pain. Dream removes his hand, but the pain still echoes.

"I barely even touched you," he says, voice tinted with something like awe. "Incredible."

Tommy attempts to buck his hips. He thrashes, pulling his arms and kicking at air. Dream doesn't even teeter. He tightens his hold and pushes his wrists into the dirt. Tommy stops immediately, the added pressure feeling like it's crushing his bones, flares shooting up into his hands.

He goes as limp as he can, rushing out, "Stop, stop."

Dream lets up, but not by much. "Where's Tubbo, Tommy?"

"I don't know."

"Tommy," he warns. "Just answer the question."

"Fuck you, I said I didn't know."

He tsks, nimble fingers finding the underside of his arm. Tommy shifts as far away as he can—which isn't much—but Dream just follows, gently holding the back of his arm between his thumb and forefinger.

He pinches, and Tommy screams.

The pain is blinding. Actually, literally blinding, black fading in along the edges of his vision as he shouts out a sound he's sure he's never made before. It just keeps going, and going, and *going*, so intense it's all he can think of. His mind is consumed by it. He can't catch his fucking breath.

As soon as it had started it's over, Dream letting go and cupping the area, almost as if to comfort. Despite his fingers being gone Tommy can still feel it, leftover pain looping with every pulse.

"God, I knew you were loud, but that's on a whole other level."

Tommy doesn't think he's ever hated anyone more. Anger mixes in with his steady growing fear. His heart jumps when his fingers return to the spot, and dread floods him in a cool, chilling wave.

"Fuck, don't," he says quickly, entire body tensed. "You're so fucking sick."

He doesn't listen. Tommy's hit with the same blinding pain, and it's almost worse the second time around, knowing what was coming making it hit just that much harder.

His throat strains with the force of his scream. Its high-pitched, guttural tone rings in his ears even after Dream lets go. He hopes to a god he doesn't believe in that Tubbo can't hear it.

Tommy breathes hard. He stares up at him, at his expressionless, unblinking mask, wanting nothing more than to smash it into shards.

Dream rubs his arm tenderly. Tommy closes his eyes so as to suppress his flinch.

"Come on, now," he drawls. "You know how to make this stop."

"If you think I'm telling you anything you're even more stupid than I thought."

"I can do this forever, you know. There are dozens, probably *hundreds* of ways to hurt the human body without leaving a mark." He shifts so that he's on one knee, right foot coming up to rest near his head. "Here. I'll teach you another one."

He separates Tommy's hands, pinning one down with the heel of his boot and grabbing the other. The odd angle makes one of Tommy's shoulders hover off the ground, and he jerks, trying to use what little leverage it gives him to his advantage.

Dream squeezes his wrist joint until he whimpers and stills.

The back of Tommy's hand warms as Dream aligns his palm with it, calluses pressing into his knuckles. He curls his fingers until Tommy's are pressed into a tight claw shape. He holds it there, unmoving, and Tommy only has a few moments to wonder how this is supposed to hurt before Dream tightens his grip and tilts the angle upwards.

His fingers are breaking. Tommy doesn't even try to suppress his scream as every structure from his fingertips to his knuckles feels like it snaps.

It's electric. He registers in the recesses of his mind that he's thrashing, doing everything he can to escape this, the back of his head scraping the ground, dust and dirt coating his hair and clothes.

It goes on for longer. Much longer than the pinching had.

Forever, it feels like.

Dream lets go completely. Tommy lets out a soft whimper as he drops his hand to his chest. To his surprise, nothing seems broken— his fingers move as he flexes them, and other than a dull ache that pulses in time with his heart, they're fine.

God. He never wants to feel that again. As Dream sits back on top of him, reaching for his hands again with only the kind of nonchalance a fucking psychopath could muster in a situation like this, Tommy knows he'll have to go through this over, and over, reexperiencing the same bone-snapping pain until he snaps himself, spilling the only secret that matters anymore.

Dream takes his hand with care. He toys with his finger softly, like a child marvelling at how much bigger their parent's hands are compared to their own.

“You’re a terrible person,” Tommy says, much more winded than he’d like.

“Shhh,” he coos, voice soft. “Catch your breath.”

“Motherfucker. You— fucking sick. You’re fucking sick, man. The most—”

His words cut off as Dream quickly repositions their hands and presses with much more force than the last time, movement so jerky it’s almost like he’s irritated.

Tommy leaves this moment entirely. He’s shot off to somewhere where the only things in existence are his hand and the pain that wraps around it. No sound, no sights, no Dream or Tubbo or anything other than the desperate desire for everything to stop.

Dream’s weight on his hips and the pain leave simultaneously as a figure suddenly barrels into them.

It takes Tommy a second to come to, still reeling from the electric aftershocks. He lays there, using his now freed hand to cradle his other one, breath coming in pants, feeling the rest of his body return.

"Nice to finally see the man of the hour," he hears Dream say, and he sits up so fast his head spins.

Tubbo lays sprawled out on the ground a few feet away. Tubbo plants his hands flat on the mix of grass and dirt and pushes himself up, brown hair sticking out on one side with a trail of grime to match on his cheek. His gaze lands on Tommy, and concern etches into every piece of him.

"Tommy," he breathes out.

Tommy gets on his feet, wincing at the way his clothes brush against the skin. "You idiot," he says softly.

Dream brings his hands together. "Well, this has been fun, but I'd say we have some business to attend to, wouldn't you agree, Tubbo?" He reaches into one of the sewn-on pockets on his cargo pants and pulls out a pocket watch. "If we leave now, we can make it by day break."

"He's not going anywhere with you," Tommy says.

"He's a criminal." Dream pockets his watch, looking coolly between them. "And he's going to be punished like one." He puts a finger up for each item he lists. "Attempted murder, theft, abuse of power...I could go on, really."

"Abuse of power?" Tubbo exclaims. "Oh, that's real rich. What"—he does air quotes—"punishment are you getting, then?"

"I'm not the president, Tubbo. There's never been any power for me to abuse."

He gestures for him to follow and starts walking. When Tubbo doesn't move, standing there with his shoulders pushed back, he makes a sound of disappointment, shaking his head and retracing his steps back.

"Come on. Don't make me force you, now."

"He's not going," Tommy repeats. "You can't have him."

He shushes him. "Not now, Tommy. The grown-ups are talking."

Rage flares in him. If it weren't for the damn potion he'd charge him, like Tubbo had, just for the satisfaction of wiping off the damn smirk he can hear in his voice.

Dream turns to Tubbo. "You're coming with me. Either willingly, or by force. Your choice."

Tubbo's eyes flicker to Tommy, just for a moment, as if to ask, *What do we do?*

"Last chance," Dream says.

Tommy runs through their options. He has a dagger somewhere in the house, not that he can reach it. They don't have any potions, any shields, any armour. No actually useful weapons. They're screwed. All they have are themselves.

Dream must grow impatient, because he lets out a drawn-out sigh. "Just remember that you forced my hand."

He reaches into his pouch, and at the back of Tommy's head he can hear the clink of glass, of bottles of brushing against one another. Dream reels his hand back, and the potion slices through the air and smashes at Tubbo's feet.

Tubbo crumples. It seems to happen in a fraction of a second, barely visible particles in the dark rising around him dissipating into nothing. He hits the ground softly, limbs bending and giving up his weight one at a time until he goes still, sprawled on the ground. He looks like a thrown aside cadaver.

"Tubbo!" Tommy cries out. He runs to him, shouting, "What did you do to him?"

He drops to his knees, pebbles like darts through his jeans. He reaches out to Tubbo's head, moving it ever so gently so it's not bent at such a neck-breaking angle. The movement brings his face into view, and Tommy's stomach drops—his eyes are open but still, staring straight ahead blankly. He jostles his shoulder softly. Nothing happens.

"Tubbo, hey, can you hear me?" When he gets no reaction, he looks back towards Dream and raises his voice. "What the fuck did you do?"

"Paralyzing potion."

Dream advances towards them. Tommy's shoes scramble in the dirt as he tries to pull them both away. Dream stops within arm's reach, crouching.

"Move, Tommy."

Tommy shakes his head wildly. "No. You're not taking him. You can't. You can't."

Dream's hand closes around his bicep and flings him away, like he's nothing more than a minor annoyance. He squeezes right before he lets go, and Tommy cries out, falling over into the dirt as pain explodes in him.

"No," he can hear himself saying as Dream hoists Tubbo's limp body over his shoulder. "Please. Please."

Dream doesn't respond. He stands up, Tubbo securely in his hold.

Tommy scrambles to his feet. "Stop," he chokes out. "Take anything else. You can have anything here. Everything. I don't care. Take it."

He doesn't expect it to work, was honestly just spewing out words in desperation before finally trying to fight him, but to his surprise, Dream pauses. Moonlight glints off his mask, a

straight, gleaming line of it, only there for a moment before he shifts, shine disappearing to nowhere.

"Anything?" Dream asks, and it sounds like a trap. Tommy doesn't care.

"Anything," he repeats.

He means it.

"The discs, Tommy. All three of them."

The world tilts on its axis.

"What?" he asks weakly.

"That's my offer. The rest of your discs for him. Pretty fair trade, don't you think?"

What *does* he think? That he should've expected this, for one. It always comes back to the *damn* discs. Why Dream wants them is beyond him. They're special, of course, they're important, but Dream doesn't get it like he does. He doesn't understand.

They're everything. In the same way that the boy held secure in Dream's arm is everything.

He's going to do it, Tommy realizes with a detached sort of shock. He's really going to do it.

"My ender chest is inside," Tommy says quietly.

If Dream wasn't wearing his mask, he's sure he'd see his sick smile.

"Don't bother. You can use mine." He shifts his hold, stopping Tubbo from slowly sliding off.  
"We have a deal, then?"

Tommy turns his cheek. "Yes."

Dream sets Tubbo down. He reaches into his pouch. In his palm rests a small, floating cube, purple particles swirling around it. He crouches and lets it roll to the ground, whereupon its dark turquoise sides triple in size with a crisp thud.

With one last breath to steady himself, Tommy approaches it, the familiar deep echo it makes filling the air as he opens it.

Ore blocks take up the most space, diamonds littered around them. In one corner are his books; another holds a creeper head. And there, placed oh so lovingly in the centre, are his discs.

Tommy picks them up with surprisingly steady hands. He lets the ender chest fall shut.

From where he's standing, he has a perfect line of sight to where Tubbo's sprawled on the ground. The lack of any kind of expression on his face paired with unmoving eyes makes him look like a corpse.

Tommy tears his gaze away and holds out his discs for the taking.

“Oh, Tommy,” Dream says as he opens the ender chest. He places the discs in there with nowhere near the amount of care they deserve. “Cheer up a little. You were never going to win, anyway.”

“How’d you know he was here?” he forces out.

Dream closes the chest, eyeing it for a second, then says, “He never took that stupid compass out of his hand.” He laughs, then turns and starts walking away, leaving Tommy standing alone in the dirt. “Honestly. Where else would he go? You can keep the chest, by the way. Think of it as a parting gift.”

“Wait,” he says, eyes flitting between Dream’s back and Tubbo. “You can’t leave him like this.”

“Have to. If you try to give him milk, he’ll choke. Just wait an hour or so and he’ll be good as new.” He pauses, a sinister edge in the lilt of his voice. “Best not to do anything weird with him, either. He can still see and hear you.”

Nauseous at the implications but seemingly unable to open his mouth, Tommy watches him leave silently, the hole in the pit of his stomach pulling him in.

Tubbo’s heavier than he remembers, although that may just be because of how he’s entirely a dead weight in his arms. Tommy carries him bridal style to the house. He pauses in the doorway, unsure where to set him down.

His mind whirls, but he pushes everything away. He can think about the discs later. They’re not his priority right now.

He settles for sitting himself down with his back against the cupboards, shifting Tubbo so that he’s laying with his head in Tommy’s lap. His eyes must be burning, he realizes suddenly. Tommy runs his fingers down his eyelids, gentle so as to not accidentally poke him.

“Hope you’re okay with not seeing for a while, big man,” he whispers. “Not that the ceiling’s all that interesting anyway, eh?”

As expected, the only reply he gets is silence. Tommy tightens his protective hold across his shoulders and lets his head thunk back against the cupboards.

What should’ve been a painless hit is instead an explosion of pain on the back of his skull. He hisses, realizing that in his haste to care for Tubbo, he’d forgotten to grab milk for himself. Well, too late now. He’s not moving until Tubbo is.

The silence gives him time to think, air still around them.

He hasn’t been this close to another person in ages. The fact that it’s Tubbo, his body warm under Tommy’s arm, head heavy on his thighs, makes him feel all sorts of things. Longing, for one. The desire to return to a time where being like this was a common occurrence.

Despite being in his arms, Tommy doesn't think he's ever missed him quite as hard as he does right now.

"I wish you never did what you did," Tommy whispers, taking great care to keep his voice low, almost as if Tubbo was sleeping and he didn't want to wake him.

He feels a ball forming in his throat. Words pour out without his permission.

"Like, what the fuck? We were...we were supposed to be best friends."

He takes a deep breath to steady himself. Tommy focuses on his breathing, on the stupid calming technique from Wilbur where he's supposed to picture a flower blooming and closing in time with his breaths. As the flower in his head closes, he whispers, "Sorry."

He probably shouldn't try to talk about things while Tubbo isn't able to defend his side. It wouldn't be fair.

Then again...maybe he *should*. Maybe this is what Tommy needs: to get everything off his chest in one go, without anyone telling him he's wrong or acting like he can't see the other point of view.

"Okay," he says, "I'm going to talk now and you're going to listen." Tommy stares straight ahead, at the way a plank of wood in the walls has a crack running down its middle. "Shit's hard, though, so don't judge me."

If he focuses, he can hear crickets buzzing in the dark outside.

"You don't know what it's like, being alone out here. You go mental. Seconds feel like hours. It was a terrible fucking punishment, and for what? Seriously, for what?"

It was terrible for reasons other than being alone physically, in the present. He probably could've dealt with that, could've grit his teeth and beared it, if he'd had someone on his side, someone he could return to when it was all over.

"You hurt me." And oh, Tommy's eyes are wet. He blinks. He doesn't bother wiping his cheeks, directing his energy instead to keeping his voice level. He clears his throat. "And I'm like, *angry* at you. You took away the only person who made me feel safe." He gives in, bringing the back of his hand up to dry his face. "I don't know if that makes sense to you. How can you take away yourself, right?"

He's nearing his end. His voice has begun shaking ever so subtly, but he doesn't want Tubbo to know. He's suddenly grateful that he can't see him like this, despite the fucked-up-ness of the situation.

"I don't know." Tommy rests a hand on Tubbo's head, gently brushing his fingers through his fringe. He sighs.

"I miss you."

The confessions sits in the air, unanswered.

Tommy sits in the silence. After a while, his eyes seem to close of their own accord. The stress of the day starts to take its toll on him, adrenaline finally fading away and leaving a weak weariness in its place. His throat is thick, and he's tired, and it's so simple to let the heaviness of sleep sink into his mind and pull him under. He doesn't even try to fight it.

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Something's wrapped around his waist and pushing into his stomach.

Tommy squeezes his eyes then blinks them open, squinting at moonlight pouring in through the window. There's a head of ruffled brown hair glued to his chest, arms wrapped around him and holding him close. He gets a whiff of long-time faded coconut shampoo.

"Tubs?" he asks, voice low and scratchy. Memories flash through his head at record speed. "Are you okay?"

Tubbo tightens his arms, shaking his head against Tommy's chest.

He straightens up. "You hurt anywhere?" A quick glance confirms that they're alone in the house, and even though he knows Ghostbur will be gone for another few days, he still shouts, "Ghostbur!"

"No," Tubbo mumbles into the fabric of a shirt. There's a hitch in his breath, a hoarseness to his voice that Tommy has only been privy to a handful of times. Tommy's shoulders drop.

He wishes Tubbo would look at him, but when he tries to coax him up, all he gets is the shake of his head and more pressure on his chest. "Tubbo. Hey. You gotta tell me if you're hurt, man."

"Not hurt," he insists. "Not like that."

"If you die from any side effects I'm going to be proper pissed."

It doesn't get him the laugh he'd hoped it would. Not even a chuckle.

Tubbo lets out a shaky breath. "You gave up your discs for me."

Tommy's glad he's holding on to him, because if he wasn't, he doesn't know what would've happened—it's like his chest crumples bone by bone and Tubbo becomes the support pins that are keeping his fragile frame together.

"I—" Tommy starts, then abandons his sentence in favour of finally wrapping his arms around Tubbo. He fills up the space perfectly, all warm and solid and oh so familiar. It feels so good, so *right*, that for a moment no wrong exists in the world.

He can feel the way Tubbo stills, then relaxes into it. Tommy rests his chin atop his head. "Not like I had much of a choice in the matter."

It's like the words break something in him. It starts small, the way Tubbo's body shakes minutely, little, silent heaves that transition into bigger ones, as if his lungs aren't getting enough air.

All at once he's sobbing.

Tommy doesn't know what to do. The sounds coming out of Tubbo are horrible, anguished cries he can tell he's trying his very best to muffle, mixed with shuddering gasps that move him back and forth.

"Hey, hey, it's okay," Tommy says, pulling him closer. "It's okay. Everything's fine. We're safe. You're safe."

"How are you so good?" comes his reply, wet and cracked open. He sounds desperate. "How..." Tubbo shoves his arm between them to cover his eyes. "Fuck."

Tommy rubs the back of his head. "Just breathe, man."

"I can't believe you did that. After...after what I did, what you *said*."

He's said a lot of things. Many of which he remembers with a certain kind of ache, almost with regret.

Tubbo looks up, eyes red and swollen. "I'm so sorry, Tommy. You gotta believe that. I- I miss you so"—he chokes—"so much."

Tommy's heart just fucking shatters.

God. He doesn't want to be mad anymore. He's tired. He's so damn tired. Tubbo's regretful, repenting, literally crying on his goddamn chest. It'd be possible for things to change if he'd just fucking let them.

"Please," Tubbo says. "Please, forgive me. Let me make things better."

And, like it's the easiest thing in the world, Tommy breathes out and replies, "Okay."

## Chapter End Notes

that's a wrap, folks. hope you enjoyed :)

also, as a bonus: i saw this one author who writes their stories on paper include a pdf copy of their first draft, and i thought that was really cool to look at, so [here's](#) most of the pages of this last chapter :D (just don't judge my terrible handwriting lmao)

thanks for reading <33



Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!